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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BERLIN 000194

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [GM](#) [KISL](#)  
SUBJECT: ERDOGAN INFLAMES INTEGRATION AND TURKISH EU  
ACCESSION DEBATES

REF: MUNICH 52

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission John Koenig for Reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's overtures to the Turkish community and statements against assimilation during his February 7-10 visit to Germany caused a political tempest. His call for Turks living in Germany to reaffirm strong ties to Turkey and educate their children in the Turkish language were viewed by many in Germany as both a hindrance to German government efforts to promote integration of foreigners and an unwelcome intrusion into German domestic affairs. German government officials from all parts of the political spectrum expressed concern about the Turkish government's extensive role in the affairs of Turks in Germany. Erdogan made clear in his public statements that he hopes Turkish citizens living in Germany will promote Turkish foreign policy, such as its aspirations for EU membership. Erdogan also firmly rejected an EU "privileged partnership" at last week's Munich Security Conference (reftel), calling it a poor substitute for Turkey's long-standing ambitions to become a full member of the EU. Erdogan's overall message was likely intended to enhance his standing with Turkey's electorate, but German antipathy to his message could strengthen German public opinion against Turkish EU membership. End summary.

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Erdogan's Confusing Message  
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¶2. (SBU) During his visit to Germany, Erdogan clearly staked Turkey's claim to the loyalties of Turks living in Germany. He warned the Turkish community against assimilating into Germany society and culture, asserting in a public speech that "assimilation is a crime against humanity." This statement was interpreted by some Germans to mean that Turkish-Germans should consider themselves Turkish above all else. At the same time, he expressed support for "integration" in the form of German language acquisition as a supplement to Turkish. Furthermore, at a rally in Cologne before 20,000 cheering ethnic Turks, he appeared to call for their allegiance to Turkey (over Germany) by references to "we Turks" and the singing of the Turkish national anthem. He also suggested that schools teaching primarily in the Turkish language be established throughout Germany. At the site of the recent tenement fire in Ludwigshafen, in which nine ethnic Turks died (among them, some German citizens), Erdogan called for the bodies to be flown "home" to Turkey. Some Germans understood this statement to mean that, in Erdogan's view, even Turks with German citizenship are fundamentally more Turkish than German. A Turkish Studies analyst told CG Duesseldorf that Erdogan's address "sounded like a campaign speech" and an appeal for AKP votes in future

elections.

13. (C) The German Foreign Office's Turkey Desk told poloff that the official bilateral relationship with Turkey has not been damaged. Still, high-ranking German politicians of a wide-range of political parties indicated their deep displeasure with Erdogan's attempt to curry the allegiance of Turks in Germany. Chancellor Angela Merkel countered Erdogan's claim to the loyalties of Turkish-Germans, stating that "their loyalty must belong to the German state." CSU party chairman Erwin Huber called Erdogan's proposals "poison for integration." CDU/CSU caucus chairman Volker Kauder accused Erdogan of "interfering in Germany's internal affairs." SPD caucus chairman Peter Struck rejected Erdogan's calls for Turkish language based schools, stressing that "We do not want a parallel society in Germany." Left Party leader Gregor Gysi added that Erdogan "abused the situation" by "trying to gain voter support" among Turkish citizens living in Germany. (Note: The Turkish Embassy refused to comment to Embassy Berlin about Erdogan's trip. End note.)

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Turkey Complicates Germany's Integration Efforts  
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14. (C) Turks in Germany generally support Erdogan's approach to the Turkish diaspora. Burhan Kesici, President of the Islamic Federation in Berlin, told poloff that "it is appropriate for a foreign head of state to speak directly to his citizens in foreign lands." (Note: Most ethnic Turks living in Germany hold Turkish citizenship. End note.) Many Turks in Germany also insist that, after all, Erdogan did express support for integration in terms of mastering the

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German language. However, another close contact of the Embassy, Ali Ertan Toprak, General Secretary of the Alevi Community, believes that Erdogan's proposals, such as establishing Turkish schools in Germany, would be "a step backward" for the Turkish community, as his approach would reinforce parallel societies that are detrimental to integration. He also accused Erdogan of double standards: criticizing assimilation in Germany, while "carrying out a first-rate assimilation policy" in Turkey directed against Kurds, Christians, and Alevis.

15. (C) Erdogan's proposals renewed discussion about the appropriate role of the Turkish government in German domestic affairs. Indeed, the largest Turkish religious organization in Germany, DITIB, which operates hundreds of mosques throughout Germany, is managed by Ankara's Directorate of Religious Affairs, Diyanet. The business card of DITIB's general secretary, Sadi Arslan, lists him as the Turkish Embassy's Counselor for Religious Affairs. Such an extensive role in the lives of Turkish-Germans by the Turkish government was considered appropriate decades ago -- even by the German government -- when Turks lived as temporary guest workers in Germany. Now that ever more Turks are German citizens, however, and plan to stay permanently in Germany, some Germans are rethinking whether Turkish government involvement with ethnic Turks in Germany continues to make sense. Today, there is growing suspicion among the German public about what some see as Turkey's attempt to cultivate a "country within a country," in which ethnic Turks hold a stronger allegiance to the Turkish state than to the German one.

16. (C) According to the Chancellery's Maximilian Mueller-Haerlin, confidant to Integration Commissioner Maria Boehmer, "Erdogan's trip has not been helpful to the cause of integration in Germany." Ali Aslan, organizer for the Federal Interior Ministry's Islam Conference process, agrees that the fallout from Erdogan's proposals will complicate the Chancellor's and Interior Minister's pro-integration efforts. Parliamentarian Lale Akguen (SPD) said the enthusiasm that

Erdogan's speech generated among Turks showed that "our integration efforts to date have not succeeded."

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Greater Opposition to Turkey's EU Accession?  
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¶17. (C) Historically, Turkey has wanted Turks living in Germany to promote Turkish foreign policy. Erdogan stated, in his Cologne speech, that Turks in Germany "should exert effective influence on the German political landscape" and "engage in lobbying to protect our interests," such as Turkish accession to the EU. The German government is split on this issue, with the Merkel and the CDU/CSU favoring a "privileged partnership" short of actual membership and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) open to full membership. The MFA's Turkey Desk told us they do not expect Erdogan's controversial statements to damage Turkey's EU membership talks.

¶18. (C) CDU/CSU Deputy Caucus Chairman Wolfgang Bosbach told DCM that German public opinion, always skeptical of Turkey's EU membership, could well become more firmly entrenched against Turkey's EU accession as a result of Erdogan's overtures. CSU Chairman Erwin Huber publicly echoed the view of many conservatives, claiming that "Erdogan preached Turkish nationalism on German soil. This is anti-European and substantiates our reservations with regard to Turkey's membership in the European Union." The Chancellery's Geza von Geyr (Senior Director for Security and Foreign Policy) told Political MC that "Erdogan's visit had not made Turkey's EU membership simpler." A close Embassy contact in the federal government responded to poloff that certain high-profile politicians, "the usual suspects, who indulge their conservative constituencies and are dead set against Turkey joining the EU, can be relied upon to always look hard for fodder to argue against Turkey's EU membership."

¶19. (C) In view of Erdogan's statements and recent Turkey-related events that have attracted negative media attention in Germany -- such as the perplexingly lengthy and serpentine court battle in Turkey of a 17 year-old German boy accused of sexual relations with an underage British girl; the anticipated lifting of the headscarf ban in Turkish universities (and associated fears of a decline in secularism in Turkey); and Turkish suspicions of race-motivated arson in the Ludwigshafen fire -- Germans increasingly ask themselves if Turkey is compatible with the EU. Some Germans have privately expressed concern to poloff that Turkey could exert

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an even greater influence over Turkish-Germans, in ways counter to integration, if Turkey were to become an EU member.

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Comment: Unintended Consequences  
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¶10. (C) Erdogan may have succeeded in strengthening Turkey's influence on Turks in Germany and solidifying his support in Turkey. But if his aim was to promote bilateral relations and Turkey's bid for EU membership, his efforts seem to have backfired, since Germans now appear increasingly skeptical about both Turkey's compatibility with Europe and the Turkish government's "intrusion" into German domestic affairs. End comment.

¶11. (U) This message was coordinated with CG Frankfurt and CG Duesseldorf.  
TIMKEN JR